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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000462

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PLEASE PASS TO MCC, G/NICOLE BIBBINS SEDACA

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SUBJECT: U/S DOBRIANSKY'S MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER QIRBI

Classified By: DCM Nabeel Khoury for reasons 1.4 b and d.

11. (C) Summary. On February 24 Under Secretary for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky thanked Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi for Yemen's partnership in the Global War on Terrorism and encouraged the ROYG to expand intelligence sharing cooperation with the USG. In response to the FM's complaints over Democracy Assistance Dialogue foot-dragging by the Italians, U/S suggested that the ROYG plan to work with the Democracy Transition Center in Hungary to share their experiences. U/S encouraged the ROYG to use their MCC threshold status to accomplish reform in the area of corruption. Raising press freedom, Qirbi acknowledged U.S. concerns and said it was a "challenge" that the ROYG is addressing. Qirbi closed the meeting expressing hope for the direction reform is taking in Yemen. End Summary.

Intelligence Sharing

12. (C) U/S thanked Foreign Minister Qirbi for Yemen's role as a partner in the fight against international terrorism, congratulated him for Yemen's success in combating terrorism within Yemen, and assured him of the high value the U.S. places on its cooperative CT relationship with Yemen. Pressing for increased USG access to information collected by the Yemeni security services, U/S said "information sharing is an area of this cooperation we would like to see expand."

Democratic Reforms - BMENA Dialogue for Democracy

13. (C) U/S commended Yemen's bold stance on democracy, and credited Yemen's participation in the BMENA process with re-focusing other regional actors on democratic reform. U/S highlighted ROYG membership in the BMENA Dialogue for Democracy (DAD) as an opportunity to enhance Yemen's leadership role. Qirbi agreed, saying "we were once very enthusiastic about it, perhaps too enthusiastic." Qirbi shared ROYG frustrations with its (Turkish and Italian) DAD partners, "it has been eight months and we are stuck over financial matters -- the Italians do not want to pay."

Beyond BMENA...How About Hungary?

14. (C) Without directly raising ROYG's desire to establish a permanent DAD center in Sanaa, Qirbi asked U/S to weigh in with the Italians. "At the last meeting in Rome," complained Qirbi, "I told the Italians that if we are not going to do something, then let's not waste our money on travel!" U/S responded that the U.S. continues to engage the Italians on how best to utilize the DAD, but added that Yemen should not overlook other international opportunities. Mentioning Hungary's proposed Global Center for Democracies in Transition, U/S suggested it was an excellent forum for Yemen to share its considerable experience in running elections with other new democracies. "We are ready to engage with anyone," Qirbi responded, "after all, the value of democracy is not in talking but in participation."

Fighting Corruption Through MCC

15. (C) U/S told Qirbi she was delighted that Yemen qualified for Millennium Challenge Account threshold status. This is a tremendous opportunity for Yemen to use additional resources to move forward with reform projects that "you determine are critical" to your own reform efforts. Emphasizing that Yemen is now at a crucial juncture, U/S said the U.S. has real concerns about the challenge of corruption in Yemen. Donor assistance would have a much greater impact, said U/S, if Yemen addressed its serious corruption problems.

16. (C) Qirbi said the ROYG has established an interagency committee to identify where it is not performing well on MCC indicators. "The MFA's position," said the FM, "is that MCC is an opportunity to move beyond rhetoric to truly address critical issues." He shared his view that reform efforts must have benchmarks and that line ministries must be held

accountable for implementation. When President Saleh is informed about acts of corruption, confided Qirbi, the Government has taken steps to punish these acts in some ministries. However, he continued, the process of combating corruption must be institutionalized. U/S agreed, stressing that MCC requires concrete, tangible progress on this serious issue.

Qirbi Raises Press Freedoms

17. (C) In a likely effort to preempt USG talking points on deteriorating press freedoms in Yemen, the Foreign Minister raised the issue himself. "We are facing a challenge with freedom of the press," said the FM, "but you must understand our recent history." Qirbi suggested that perhaps the press law needed amending, but explained that following 1990 unification, hundreds of unregulated media outlets sprung up in Yemen that focused on north-south divisions instead of national objectives. Accusing the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) press of inciting the 1994 civil war, Qirbi said that ensuring a "secular, united democratic state," trumps press freedoms. U/S responded that the U.S. understands the delicate role of press freedoms in a democracy with national security problems, but "different points of view do not threaten a democracy."

18. (C) "Press freedoms build the base of a strong democracy," U/S told Qirbi. She urged the ROYG to settle the Khaiwani case, as it is drawing international attention away from the positive steps Yemen is taking. Moving quickly to amend the press law, suggested U/S, would be an important step forward. Qirbi reiterated President Saleh's July 2004 pledge to amend the press law and outlaw prison sentences for journalists, but added that Presidential statements "cannot make it happen over night." Qirbi shared his view that improving press freedoms in Yemen requires a "huge package" including education efforts to change ROYG views, particularly among the security services, and judicial reforms such as training for court officers. Pointing to the inclusion of media reform in the ROYG's threshold proposal, U/S suggested employing MCC assistance to develop and implement such a strategy.

Palestine, Iraq, and the U.S. Role in Regional Reform

19. (C) Moving to the regional context, Qirbi said he was pleased to see President Bush and Secretary Rice engaged and moving forward in the peace process. As for Iraq, said the FM, "we want to see a transition to complete Iraqi sovereignty as soon as possible. We would like to see the U.S. role in the region move away from militarism to the development arena," continued Qirbi, "the road to peace and stability in the Middle East is through reforms -- democracy leads to security."

110. (C) "Arab leaders are afraid of reforms that diminish their hold on power and their control of resources," Qirbi told U/S that the U.S. should encourage Arab government to engage in reforms "in their own ways, at their own pace," lest they feel democracy is being imposed. "In the long term," responded U/S, "Arab leaders need to realize that it is to their benefit to establish a partnership with their people." Qirbi nodded in agreement, saying that President Saleh has been adept and courageous in forging ahead with reforms in Yemen despite teething pains. "We are not yet the democracy we hope to be," he said, "but we are moving in the right direction."
Khoury